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| **Focus on the slave trade****BBC NEWS**Millions were forcibly deported from Africa (Image: American Antiquarian Society)**As European countries debate whether to apologise for the transatlantic slave trade in past centuries, BBC News Online's Tom Housden examines the enforced movement of millions.**The exact numbers of Africans shipped overseas during the slave trade are hotly debated - estimates range between 10 and 28 million.What is undisputed is the degree of savage cruelty endured by men, women and children. Up to 20% of those chained in the holds of the slave ships died before they even reached their destination.

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| **The slave trade** |
| **Between 10 and 28 million people taken from Africa****17 million Africans sold into slavery on the coast of the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and North Africa****12 million Africans taken to the Americas****5 million Africans taken across the Sahara and East Africa into slavery in other parts of the world** |

Between 1450 and 1850 at least 12 million Africans were taken across the notorious Middle Passage of the Atlantic - mainly to colonies in North America, South America, and the West Indies.The Middle Passage was integral to a larger pattern of commerce developed by European countries.European traders would export manufactured goods to the west coast of Africa where they would be exchanged for slaves.**Click here to see a map of the North Atlantic slave trade**The slaves were then sold for huge profits in the Americas.**Huge profits**Traders use the money to buy raw materials such as sugar, cotton, coffee, metals, and tobacco which were shipped back and sold in Europe.

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| **Unknown numbers of people - according to some estimates at least 4 million - died in slave wars and forced marches** |

Slavery created and then relied on a large support network of shipping services, ports, and finance and insurance companies.New industries were created, processing the raw materials harvested or extracted by slaves in the AmericasThe slave trade contributed significantly to the commercial and industrial revolutions. Cities such as Liverpool and Amsterdam grew wealthy as a result of the trade in humans.In Europe, slavery was often justified by the state on philanthropic grounds. They argued that Africans taken into captivity could then be "saved" by conversion to Christianity.**Slavery in the east**However, Europe did not have a monopoly on slavery. Muslim traders also exported as many as 17 million slaves to the coast of the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and North Africa.

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| **Slave narratives offering an African perspective on the slave trade contributed to the growing anti-slavery movement.** |

Some historians say that between the years 1500 and 1900, five million African slaves were transported via the Red Sea, the Sahara and East Africa to other parts of the world.In Africa, unknown numbers of people - according to some estimates at least four million - died in wars and forced marches before ever being shipped to another continent.Within central Africa, the slave trade led to huge population upheavals. Coastal tribes fled slave-raiding parties, and captured slaves were redistributed to different regions in Africa.Slave dealing also contributed to the expansion of powerful West African kingdoms such as Mali and Ghana. |